

WASHINGTON. D.C. – House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) sent a letter today to White House Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett calling for a full release of information related to a conference call that occurred on August 10th

in which the White House Office of Public Engagement inappropriately asked participants on the call to support the Administration's efforts.

"It is inappropriate for representatives of the White House, NEA, and CNCS to formally ask artists and entertainers to use their talents to support the President's agenda because many of these people rely on NEA grants to subsidize their livelihoods," Issa wrote. "Moreover, using NEA to promote the Administration's agenda circumvents federal and constitutional law controlling certain types of agency communication. Federal law prohibits the use of federal funds to pay for public relations campaigns absent a specific appropriation for that purpose."

At the request of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Communications Director Yosi Sergeant, groups of "artists, producers, promoters, organizers, influencers, marketers, tastemakers, leaders, or just plain cool people" were invited to participate in the conference call along with Nell Abernathy, Director of Outreach for United We Serve and Buffy Wicks, Deputy Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement. During the call, the 75 members of the art and entertainment community were urged to promote the President's agenda by creating art consistent with the goals of *United We Serve*.

“Using the largest national funder of the arts to apply pressure on its grantees to create art in support of the White House’s agenda is clearly inappropriate,” Issa wrote. “Furthermore, using taxpayer dollars and federal employees to create an alliance whereby the NEA becomes the de facto strategic communications firm of the White House is unlawful. Federal law is in place to prevent the political machinery of a campaign from carrying over to the White House after an election. Activating artists and art groups reliant on NEA funds under the implied threat of withholding future grants is a Chicago-style tactic that should have been left on the campaign trail.”

Among the items Ranking Member Issa asks the White House to provide are a full and complete list of all the participants on the conference call, a full and complete explanation of how invitees to the call were selected, any description or consultation provided by the White House Counsel regarding the legal implications of the call and a full and complete description of how the call was arranged.

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